

I live in California, and hardly a week goes by that I do not read about yet another death or accident due to a train colliding with either a vehicle or a pedestrian. In some weeks there may be 2 or more accidents that occur, and just in the general vicinity where I live. The state of California already requires the use of locomotive horns at public and private railroad crossings, as is the case in many other states, yet there is no shortage of accidents on California's rails and elsewhere.

This week's accident, reported in the Sacramento Bee (Jan. 26, 2000), is the story of another needless and tragic death attributable once again, to an inadequately protected crossing, or in this case, a completely unprotected crossing. A young man attempted to cross a track as a train approached. But the train, going about 79 miles per hour, was too much competition for him. As reported in the Bee, "There are no barriers separating the railroad tracks from heavily traveled Roseville Road." The lack of a rule requiring that every crossing be equipped with crossing arms or barriers seems to me an omission bordering on negligence. Yet there are thousands of similarly designed crossings all over these United States.

Since the primary mission of the Federal Railroad Administration is to ensure railroad safety, I cannot understand why the agency, rather than imposing a mandate requiring the use of locomotive horns, should not first and foremost mandate the upgrading of all crossings, including both public and private ones. And, the FRA should do this immediately and without tying the upgrades to a universal mandate requiring the sounding of locomotive horns. Horns did not stop the boy on the bicycle from crossing Roseville Road in front of a train and horns did not stop the driver of the truck who caused the multiple deaths in Bourbonnais, IL last year.

Roseville, CA is now home to one of the largest rail yards in the country. All east-west and north-south traffic for the region goes through the Roseville yard. Several rail yards in California and in other states have been closed and the additional traffic picked up right here in Roseville. Recent railroad mergers, increased traffic through our region, reconstruction and expansion of the Roseville yard, the introduction of more powerful air horns, and the widely reported practice of abusing horns, all have contributed to the intensity and quantity of noise pollution in our region. Noise generated by high decibel horns at the crossings in Roseville, neighboring cities, and inside the Roseville rail yard, is degrading the quality of life for thousands of people, affecting general health and quality of sleep, as well as affecting property values.

A former U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. William H. Stewart, declared that noise is a health hazard. And more than twenty years ago, the United States Environmental Protection Agency recognized noise as a serious pollutant along with air and water contaminants. Based on our research, there are currently hundreds upon hundreds of cities all over the U.S. and Canada that are already suffering from an abundance of noise from locomotive horns. Why is the FRA advocating the proliferation of even more noise by a railroad industry even as communities all over the country are having difficulty coping with existing levels?

I support the use of supplementary safety devices, such as four-quadrant gates, median barriers and other methods, that will reduce the risk of accidents. I support the right of communities to improve crossing safety and obtain approval for quiet zones and I believe cities that have whistle bans at the present time should be allowed to maintain them. I support the right of communities to use the "wayside" or "fixed" horn as an alternative to the locomotive horn. I do not agree that in order to achieve the objective of decreased risk of accidents that it is necessary to impose a Federal mandate ordering the sounding of 114+ decibel air horns.